



Volunteers Come Out Smelling Like Roses

Posted by **Pierluigi Oliverio** on Monday, October 01, 2007

City Hall Diary

At the evening meeting last Tuesday night (Sept. 25), the San Jose City Council discussed prevailing wage and volunteers and how this relates to city jobs for parks.

I am sure most of you have volunteered your time at some point, whether in your children's school, as a coach or to pick up trash, etc. Most of you did so because it made you feel good to do something that benefits something larger than yourself.

For example, two weeks ago Terry Reilly and Beverly Rose-Hopper, community leaders and longtime residents of the Rose Garden neighborhood, coordinated a "deadheading" for Rose Garden Park. "Deadheading" is another name for "shearing" which is when you cut a rosebud so that another can emerge while the weather is still warm.

Over 140 volunteers came to shear roses at the San Jose Municipal Rose Garden. Folks came from Los Altos and Morgan Hill, but the majority of volunteers were San Jose residents from Rose Garden, Willow Glen and Almaden.

Deadheading was an annual event; however, because of the lack of volunteerism to help maintain the roses, the Rose Garden Park was put on "probation" from the All American Rose Society due to the lack of maintenance.

I am happy that this year community members organized volunteers and came out to help. I support volunteer events like this and hope to see more in the future. I also support corporations who promote volunteerism for their employees.

At the council meeting, the memo regarding prevailing wage and volunteerism included groups like Our City Forest, Habitat for Humanity and KaBoom as examples of organizations that do good volunteer work. The city also funds some of the groups who provide this volunteer work.

Although I supported the memo as it was written, I noticed that one of our greatest local volunteer resources was left out: corporations. The memo lacked the clarity that I was looking for that would allow a corporation to have its employees spend a day volunteering for something that belonged to the city, like a park for example. Therefore, I asked for an amendment that would allow people who work for corporations who wanted to volunteer their time be allowed to do so. My amendment was unanimously accepted.

It appears that we want companies to be philanthropists, but the way the memo was written, we would not allow them to donate their human capital for volunteer services. I found this to be unfair.

Large corporations often have team building and/or volunteer days which allow teams or divisions from a company to take a day or half a day off from working at their "regular job" and clean up a park. Companies will pay their employees for a regular work day, but the employees get to lend their time to a volunteer effort. Many Silicon Valley companies are known for lending their time to cleaning and pruning the Guadalupe River Park and Gardens.

There was concern that if large corporations paid their employees for spending one day cleaning up a park, they would somehow take over all the park maintenance. I understand the concern, but it is invalid.

As I shared at the meeting, folks who volunteer their time for a day are not looking to go into the park maintenance business. For example, Junior Achievement sends business people into high school classrooms to supplement curriculum. They reach over 7 million students a year. They do not put teachers out of work. Volunteers do not take away jobs; they supplement much needed park maintenance.

The acreage in parks keeps growing and, because of the structural deficit, we may not have enough gardeners for many years. We should not pass up the opportunity for volunteers, paid or unpaid, to lend a helping hand. City workers and volunteers go together and can accomplish much more by working collaboratively.

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